2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5



853 baby a little food.' I noticed, in fact, that in a native family where the father had been taught at a Mission School that it was wrong to feed a new-born baby on gruel, he yet insisted that his child should have condensed milk as well as the breast. He was as convinced as the rest of his fellows that the child would not grow up on the breast alone, and did not want people to say that he grudged his baby anything needed for its health.

[262] Thus the native's dependence on millet porridge is a habit literally forced on him from his earliest days, in fact before he has acquired the necessary ferments for digesting the starch at all. By three or four months he has become entirely used to the gruel, and by eight or nine months he is being given small lumps of *ubwali* to eat by himself. This system of cramming the infant's stomach is considered by most Europeans to be harmful, and to be responsible for the protruding abdomens of all Bemba children, although these latter may be due to enlarged spleens as well as to unsuitable diet.

● [165] The mortality of children between the ages of one and three is enormously high, for a variety of reasons, not only those connected with diet. It is impossible to be dogmatic on this point without further information. But it must be admitted that the Bemba infants cry less and have a more contented appearance than the children of the same age in this country.

When a child has reached the crawling age he is allowed and even encouraged to eat everything he can. I never heard a mother trying to restrict a small child's diet, but always boasting proudly about what a lot the child knew how to eat. He is given small handfuls of food in all his relations' houses, toddling from one hut door to another. Small children are always given the remains of food not thought good enough for grown-ups. Infants of under a year are fed with the beer dregs from last night's party, mothers saying with satisfaction: 'Look at that child. How strong he is! He likes beer already,' and any account of Bemba dishes includes a list of foods which 'no grown-up person would touch. Only children eat that.' In this way, therefore, the Bemba mother differs from the European with her more rigid ideas as to the digestive powers of her children.

To conclude, the characteristics of the Bemba system of infant feeding are three. First the length of the suckling period, and the complete freedom of the infant in feeding, both of psychological importance to the baby as well as nutritional, and valued by the

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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881 842 182 labour of the younger generation—of particular importance. There may also be a correlation between fertility rites and matrilineal descent and in fact such a correlation seems to hold good in Central Africa (see Appendix A). Bemba believe that the child is entirely formed from the physical contribution of the mother and not the father, and similar beliefs may hold in the other matrilineal tribes in the area. It is moreover common to find in primitive society that the woman is regarded as solely responsible for the failure of a couple to produce children. Impotence in man is recognized but not sterility. In patrilineal Bantu societies it is common practice for the man's agnatic kinsmen to provide bride-wealth for him to secure him a wife. If she proves barren the cattle or other objects are commonly returned or another girl provided [611] from the same lineage group. In a matrilineal society of the Bemba type the situation is rather different. The children of a marriage belong legally to the girl's family and it is to their gain if she produces children. This fact may account for the great care and attention given to fertility rites for girls among such people. The correlation of matrilineal descent with an emphasis on fertility is a hypothesis which will have to be tested more carefully in other areas. It would, of course be possible to relate the high infantile [165] mortality rate that exists among the Bemba to their desire for children and their anxiety over them. This is in fact what many Bemba do. I have for instance been told in answer to a challenging question of mine about the protective rites performed for children. 'Well! Just look what a lot of our children die'. However, high infantile mortality rates are too common in Bantu society for this to be more than a contributory cause to the desire for fertility.

881 182 622 The salient features of Bemba social structure are also reflected in this ritual. The characteristic attitudes to authority in this very hierarchical society are expressed in ceremonies by which chiefs are created and maintained in their supernatural powers, and in those economic and other ceremonies performed by the chiefs themselves. The chisungu is not specially concerned with political life although some of the pottery emblems 'teach' the girl to honour the chiefs.

881 182 561 However, the hierarchy based on age, which is also characteristic of every type of structured relationship among the Bemba, is